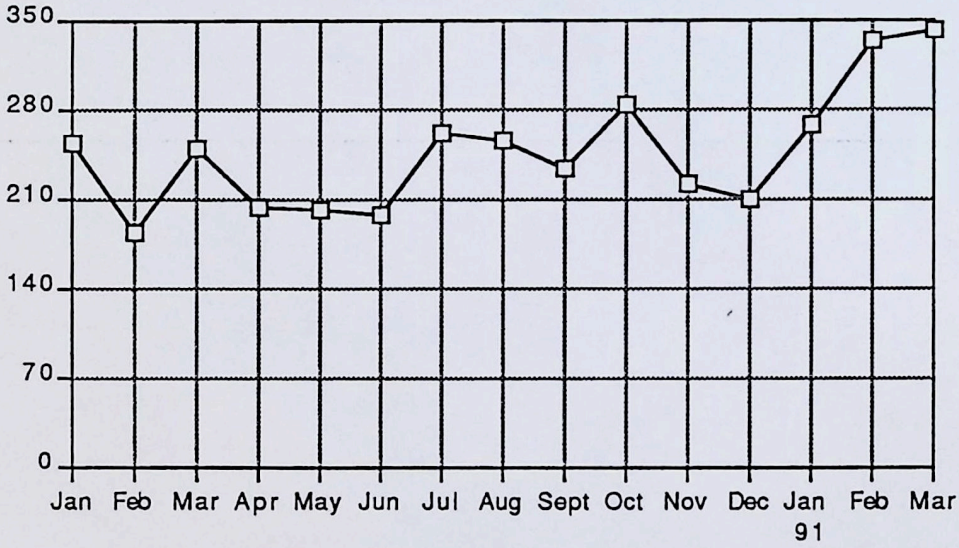
WELL Marketing First Quarter Report

April 1991
John Coate

1991 First Quarter Growth Summary

Monthly Growth

New User Signups by months:



Quarterly Growth

	Jan	Feb	March
New Users Activated	269	334	343
User Initiated Cancel	180	129	127
WELL Initiated Cancel	29	31	50
Total Cancel	209	160	177
Net Growth	60	174	166
Info Requests	84	133	175

	1st Quarter Totals	4th Quarter 1990
New subscribers:	946	718
Cancellations:	546	417
Net growth:	400	301
Avg. new/month:	315	239
Avg. # cancel/month:	182	138
Avg. net growth per month:	133	100
Average monthly bill (all):	$16.08	$13.53
Average monthly bill (active):	$25.69	$20.56
Total number of billed accounts:	4417	4021
Total number of comp. accounts:	288	281
Total number of accounts:	4705	4305

Comments: Signups went way up but so did cancellations, which happened mainly in January in response to the WELL newsletter announcing the price change. Other reasons for cancelling include difficult interface and greater financial hardship (this has noticably increased). However, *the average bills all went up,* suggesting that the perceived increased value of the price reduction led to increased online useage (as well as going along with the monthly increase) that more than made up for the number of cancellations.

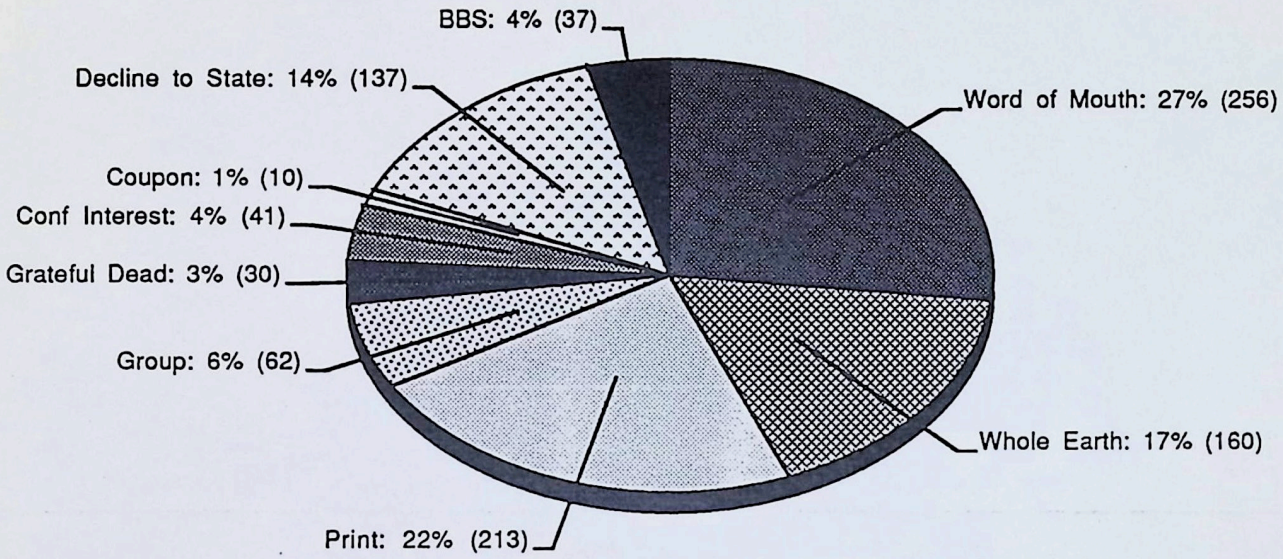
what specifically? Not this

Sources of New Subscribers

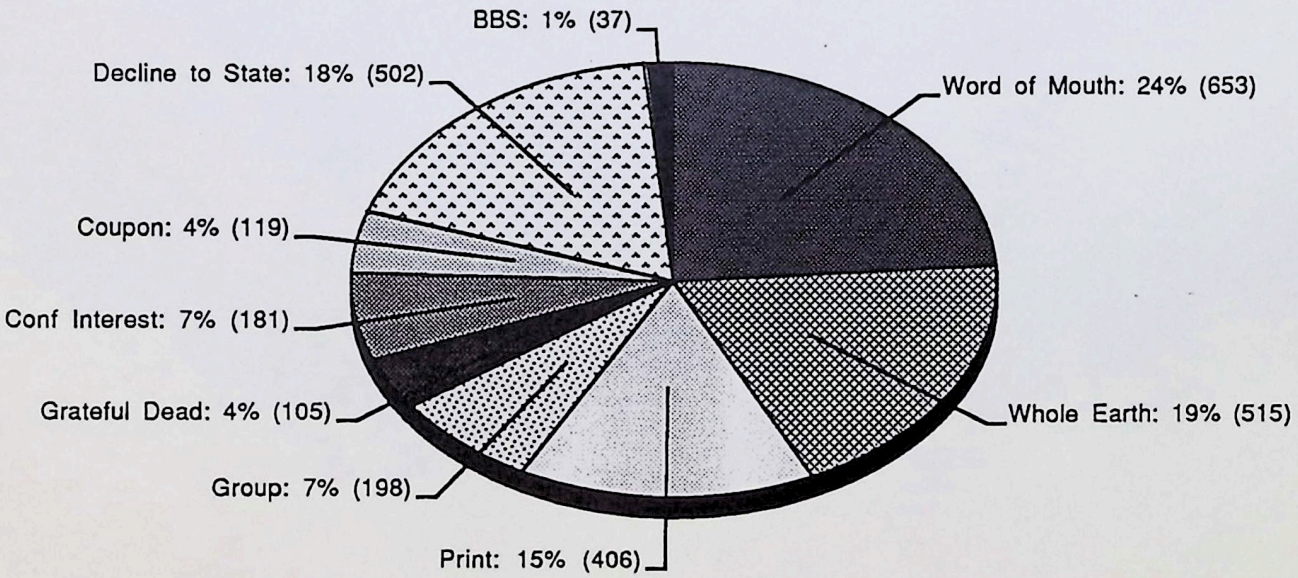
Source	Jan	Feb	Mar	1st Q Total	4th Q 1990 Total	
Word of Mouth	76	83	97	256	179	
Whole Earth	43	59	58	160	133	
Print	46	88	79	213	91	BIG+
Group Membership	21	31	10	62	26	
Grateful Dead	11	7	12	30	25	
Conf interest	9	16	16	41	35	
Coupon	1	8	1	10	99	GONE
BBS (new category)	14	15	8	37	27	
Other (decline to state)	51	35	51	137	103	
Totals	284	223	211	946	754	

Comments: Utne Reader article was a very big source of new subscribers - 61. Coupon category will be deleted after this quarter. Word of Mouth and Print are rising, Decline to State and GD are going down.

Sources by category, 1st Quarter 1991:



Sources by category, 1990 total:



First Quarter Highlights

The war in the Gulf was a publicity windfall for the WELL. The Gulf War Conference was a most stimulating forum that generated a great deal of online traffic. Useage charts show much more logging in, especially during the first week of the war.

Several new conferences were added in both the public and private areas including a promising new public conference on energy issues.

The Computers, Freedom and Privacy conference was held in Burlingame at the end of March. This conference came about largely because of issues raised on the WELL in the EFF Conference and other places. It's an example of how the WELL's discussions help the larger debate of relevant issues.

Continuing discussion online about the "you own your own words" issue shed both light and heat.

Press Coverage

The WELL was featured or mentioned in the press (newspapers, magazine and radio) a total of 18 times in the first quarter. Not only was that the largest total for one quarter, but many of those mentions were important feature stories. Utne Reader, New Age Journal, Omni, Portable Office, Link-Up, the Marin Independent Journal, the San Francisco Business Times, and the Marin Scope all had major stories featuring the WELL. The newspaper stoires were about the Gulf War Conference, including two stories that were syndicated to over thrity papers each, but the magazine stories were all concerned with the WELL as a virtual community (Utne, New Age), or as an example of the efficiencies of online communication.

The big winner for us was the Utne story which brought in more than sixty new signups.

1st Quarter Marketing Actions

Marketing spent a lot of time designing and producing promotional material in the first quarter.

A 1/6 page ad was designed and sent to Utne Reader. It will run in each issue during 1991.

Marketing revised the ad it runs in the Bay Area Media Alliance paper, Mediafile, after learning a lot more about how to design and write ads while researching the Utne ad.

Marketing completed and had printed a special companion insert for the brochure that shows the benefits of using the WELL for a group or business.

The West Marin Communications Co-op began its private WELL conference with fifteen members. This is a very exciting project that will greatly increase understanding about the WELL here in Marin County. Marketing went to a training meeting in Pt. Reyes Station and assisted the CompuMentor people. This WestNet project is being funded by CompuMentor through a grant from the Telecommunications Education Trust.

Marketing began writing an article-length piece that is basically a lengthier update of the story that ran in WER and Signal in 1988. Tentative new title is, "How People Get Along Online." The goal is to have it published in a magazine and then use it as both a reprint and as a companion to Marketing's oral presentation, also under construction.

Marketing instituted the $10 credit for WELLers who get a referral from a newuser upon registration. In the first quarter there were forty referrals. —good? bad?

Cliff as top 100?

2nd Quarter Plan

Frontend Programs:
The "GetWell" program was demonstrated to WELL staff in February. Staff was disappointed both in the sluggishness of the performance and the opacity of the design. In addition, the product is way behind schedule. It was due for release in April and is not nearly ready.

The purpose of a frontend program is twofold:

First, it must save people time so that especially from long distances they can spend more time reading WELL material and composing responses offline. As the WELL becomes larger and the amount of material available increases, this grows in importance so people can get what they need out of the WELL while conforming to the needs of their own budget.

Second, it needs to make something that is complex (the WELL's command set) more simple. this is because there are a great many people "out there" who could benefit from and contribute to the WELL, but who have neither the time nor inclination to memorize a new set of commands.

No frontend product for the WELL would be considered successful if it didn't accomplish both things.

Meanwhile, the "Sweeper" frontend produced by Jim Rutt has over forty dedicated WELL users for the PC version.

STRATEGY:

Have a Mac-based frontend program ready for promotion by the end of the 2nd quarter.

ACTION:
Terminate our agreement with Johan Strandberg due to GetWell's lateness and unsatisfactory performance.

Give the green light to Jim Rutt to produce a Mac version of sweeper. Jim says he can have something ready to go in "three months." Structure of contract? Penalty for lateness?

The Benefits of Sweeper are:
1.Jim produces the product himself with minimal involvement and expense of the WELL.
2.Sweeper is a constantly evolving product that isn't so complex and investment intensive that changing it or changing to another product in the future would not be difficult. In short, it is a product that is of an experimental nature not unlike the WELL itself.

BUDGET:
Probably none this quarter except for time spent moving things along.

Presentation
STRATEGY:
Complete the essay on "How People Get Along Online."

ACTION:
The story will be sumitted to a publication, possibly Computer Currents.

BUDGET:
No cash involved.

Online Writing Award
STRATEGY:
Begin the project.

ACTION:
Frame the parameters of the contest.
Look for a judging panel.
Decide on a deadline.

BUDGET:
No cash involved. ?

Groups
STRATEGY:
Increase group signups.

ACTION:

There are nine groups who are evaluating the WELL as an online home. Try to close with some of these groups.

BUDGET:
Telephone time only. Possible travel, but none planned at this writing.

Marketing Communications
The "Offline" newsletter, slated for the Summer issue of WER, is delayed until the Winter issue because the lead story about frontends isn't sufficiently newsworthy yet.

The brochure will be updated and reprinted this quarter. The coupon will be removed because the five hours is automatic and universal. Interesting to note that not that many people sent the coupon back, suggesting the possibility that people making electronic transactions don't want to bother with paper.

BUDGET:
$750 for printing

Advertisements
Payment to Utne in April for the July/August issue.
Payment to Mediafile in May.

BUDGET:
Utne: $930.75
Mediafile: $81

Innkeeping
Over the years the system of granting complimentary online time to WELL hosts has been a loose one, with each host making their own contract with WELL management. In 1989 management began trading specific hour amounts for specific hosting duties. This caused a split in the host group because those hosts who came before were "grandfathered" in to an unlimited time arrangement. There are some obvious inequities to this system that management would like to correct. A fair system would be one based on a mixing of conference performance and a judgement call on the part of management regarding that person's less tangible but no less important contributions to the quality of the WELL content as well as the online environment.

I longer term goal is to be able to someday reward hosts with more than just comp time, but to pay them actual money for their work and the success of their efforts. In order to do this Management is developing suitable accounting tools that can measure more than just how many times a conference was visited, and see how much time was spent in the conference and how robust the participation really is. Also tools for tracking what hosts do with the time they spend online and how much of it is in the conferences hosted.

But this is a delicate matter and great caution is being taken.